

Gorgas Home, U. OF ALABAMA
Tuscaloosa, Alabama
Tuscaloosa Co.

HABS No. 16-203
HABS
ALA
63-TUSLO
3A-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer
Ala. Polytechnic Inst., Auburn, Ala.

Project #16-203
THE GORGAS HOME
University of Alabama Campus
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

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HISTORICAL DATA:

Built: 1829-1830.

Architect: State Architect of that date.

Alterations: Some changes in rear of building, 1900.

Ownership:

The University of Alabama caused this building to be erected and has always owned it.

Site that of Old Marr Home:

This house was erected on the site of the cabin of the original squatter (Marr), this being Government property. This site was included in the original land grant to the new State of Alabama, 1819.

"The Hotel":

This house was one of the group of the first of the buildings erected by the State for an "Institution of learning" as provided in the original Federal land grant. All the first buildings were planned by the state architect and erection begun in the early twenties.

This building was designed for a hotel or college commons, and was designated as "The Hotel" in the early days of the University.

After 1865, it was used as the home of college officers.

Civil War Period:

This is one of the three buildings on the University campus which were not burned by the Federal troops on April 5, 1865.

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Tuskegee, Alabama
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General Josiah Gorgas:

General Gorgas was Chief of Ordinance for the Confederate States of America.

After the War Between the States he became the president of the University of Alabama. He used this building as his home.

Student Hospital:

For some years, during the time of Mrs. Josiah Gorgas, this home was also the student hospital, Mrs. Gorgas being the matron.

Post office of University, Alabama.

From about 1888 to 1908, the post office was operated on the lower floor of this building, Mrs. Gorgas being the first postmaster.

Present Occupants:

The Gorgas family. Long the residence of the parents of the late William C. Gorgas, Surgeon General of the United States.

**DATA NOT COMPILED AND NOT GUARANTEED
BY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS**

Source of Material:

Dr. A. B. Moore, Dean of the Graduate School, University of Alabama.

James A. Anderson, [REDACTED], Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Reviewed 1936 - H.C.F.

Project #16-203
THE GORGAS HOME
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

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ARCHITECTURAL MERIT AND DATA:

This home, apart from its historic interest, is of special interest on account of the double exterior iron stairs, giving the whole building a very unusual and graceful appearance. The ^{portico} portions of the two-story portico treatment are very good, and very consistent with the mass of the building as a whole. This type of raised building ~~which it is~~, represents a strong Mississippi Valley influence.

Source of Material:

E. Walter Burkhardt, District Administrator, HABS,
Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Alabama.

Received 1936 H.C.F.

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ADDENDUM TO
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA,
JOSIAH GORGAS HOUSE
Birmingham Industrial District
Nineth Ave. & Capstone Dr.
Tuscaloosa
Tuscaloosa County
Alabama

HABS No. AL-203

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

ADDENDUM TO
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA,
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA, JOSIAH GORGAS HOUSE

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This report is an addendum to a 3 page report previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

Location: Ninth Avenue & Capstone Drive. University of Alabama Campus, Gorgas-Manley National Register Historic District, Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa County, Alabama.

Present Owner: University of Alabama

Date of Construction: 1829

Builder/Architect/Engineer: William Nichols

Description: Gorgas House is a two-story brick raised cottage with a two-story central, open portico accessed by circular staircase. Designed by William Nichols, it served as a dining hall, faculty residence, infirmary, post office, and residence of Confederate Brigadier General Josiah Gorgas (1818-1879), president of the university in 1878, and other Gorgas family members from 1878 to 1954. Originally, the lower floor consisted of one large dining room with fireplaces at each end capable of seating 100 students. The steward and his family lived on the upper floor.

Project Information: This report is based on written documentation donated by the Birmingham Historical Society, reformatted to HABS/HAER guidelines.

Significance: Gorgas House served as the last residence of General Josiah Gorgas, the Pennsylvania-born chief of the Confederate Bureau of Ordnance, and is the "only" known shrine to this Confederate General. It is one of only four buildings of the original University of Alabama campus that survived the federal destruction during the Civil War.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Built in 1829 as the dining hall for the University of Alabama, this structure is the first permanent university building and one of only four to survive destruction of the campus during the Civil War. It is the only structure on campus that survives from English architect William Nichols' original (1828) campus master plan. The University of Alabama was chartered December 17, 1819, three days after the state was admitted to the union. The U.S. government granted the State of Alabama 72 square miles of land, the proceeds from which were to be used to establish a "seminary of learning."

Confederate General Josiah Gorgas was born near Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania in 1818. Gorgas was educated at the U. S. Military academy from 1837-1841. Upon graduation, he was appointed lieutenant of ordnance. He served as ordnance officer at arsenals in New York, Detroit and Michigan and as first lieutenant of ordnance in the War with Mexico from 1846 to 1848. After the war, he was again an ordnance officer serving in New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Alabama, Maine, and South Carolina. While stationed at the Mt. Vernon Arsenal in 1853, he met and married the Alabama Governor's daughter, Amelia Gayle. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he resigned his commission in the U. S. Army and became chief of the Confederate Bureau of Ordnance, Richmond, Va., in which position he served until the close of the war.

According to Alex Sartwell, current historian of the Geological Survey of Alabama, Gorgas had an intimate knowledge of Alabama's mineral resources and industrial capabilities, due to his stay at the Mt. Vernon arsenal, and first-hand knowledge of the state's first and recently published geological survey by Michael Toumey. He used this survey to develop the iron furnace, foundries and arsenals in what became the Confederate Industrial Corridor. (Sartwell Interview, 9/14/91)

After the war, Gorgas ventured into ironmaking at the Brierfield Furnaces. The venture proved unsuccessful. In 1870, the University of the South at Sewanee made him Vice-Chancellor, and in 1878 he became President of the University of Alabama. Due to ill health, he resigned a year later. Appointed university librarian, the Trustees also granted him and his family residence at this property throughout their lifetimes. His wife, Amelia Gayle Gorgas, became matron of the university infirmary and postmistress. The infirmary, the post office and her family were all located at "Gorgas House." After the General's death in 1883, Mrs. Gorgas became university librarian, serving until 1906. Their son William Crawford Gorgas (1854-1920), educated at Sewanee and Bellevue hospital medical college in New York, became Surgeon General for the U. S. Army, receiving international honor for his conquering of yellow fever and malaria during construction of the Panama Canal in

the early 1900s. Gorgas family members resided in "Gorgas House" until 1954 when it was declared a "state shrine."

Now furnished with mementos and documents of the Gorgas family, the Gorgas House is maintained by the University of Alabama as a museum.

Sources Consulted

HABS

Tuscaloosa Ct. Site Survey

Tuscaloosa Landmarks

The University of Alabama - A Guide to the Campus, 24-25

Historic Homes of Alabama, 1935, pp. 30-36